

Justice, Love, and Humility

Printed Text · Micah 6:3-8

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EVALUATE how to honor God gratefully by exhibiting the character traits that God requires; EXPRESS feelings about living up to God's expectations for us to be just, loving, and humble; and LEAD the community into making God's requirements a reality.

In Focus

Lamar has owned and operated his restaurant for decades. What started as a small diner in a strip mall has grown to three successful locations in their city. But over the past few years, the stress of running his restaurants has begun to wear on him. He has also been very short and less forgiving with his staff. Just last week, he yelled at a waitress because she was five minutes late for her shift. Employees began to fear his angry outbursts. One night, an old friend of Lamar walked into the restaurant; Quincy Tipp, who had been Lamar's partner at his first location. Lamar's face brightened and he smiled broadly, "Hey, Tipp! Man, it's great to see you!" He gave Quincy a handshake, a big hug, and ushered him over to their best table. Over dinner, and for several hours after, the two friends laughed and reminisced about old times. They had sacrificed and worked long hours in the hopes that someday the restaurant would be a grand success. Most of all, they had wanted to honor God with their business. Lamar realized that he had been led astray from their initial purpose in opening the restaurant.

As Christians, when we remember all that God has done for us, we can extend His love and mercy to others. In today's lesson, we'll discuss how God desires that we would respond to His blessings in our lives.

Keep In Mind

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8, KJV).

Words You Should Know

- A. Redeemed (Micah 6:4) *padah* (Heb.) – To ransom, rescue, or deliver.
- B. Mercy (v. 8) *khesed* (Heb.) – Goodness or kindness (especially as extended to the lowly, needy, miserable, or in a lower position of power).

Say It Correctly

Shittim. shee-TEEM

Beor. be-OR

KJV

Micah 6:3 O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.

4 For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

5 O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor

answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord.

6 Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?

7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

8 He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

NLT

Micah 6:3 “O my people, what have I done to you? What have I done to make you tired of me? Answer me!

4 For I brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from slavery. I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to help you.

5 Don’t you remember, my people, how King Balak of Moab tried to have you cursed and how Balaam son of Beor blessed you instead? And remember your journey from Acacia Grove to Gilgal, when I, the Lord, did everything I could to teach you about my faithfulness.”

6 What can we bring to the Lord? Should we bring him burnt offerings? Should we bow before God Most High with offerings of yearling calves?

7 Should we offer him thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Should we sacrifice our firstborn children to pay for our sins?

8 No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

The People, Places, and Times

Balaam. Balaam was an example of one of the ancient Near Eastern prophets who did not serve the Israelite God. Rather, he worshiped the many other false gods in the region. Balaam was highly regarded among the Midianites and possessed a great deal of power and influence. King Balak of Moab tried to get Balaam to curse Israel as the Israelites traveled through the Moabite countryside. While traveling to meet Balak, God spoke to Balaam through his donkey, commanding him to only deliver God’s message to King Balak (Numbers 22:21–30). Instead of a curse, God used Balaam to speak a blessing on Israel.

Human Sacrifice. There is some evidence of child sacrifice in ancient Syria-Palestine and Carthage. The nations surrounding Israel also worshiped fertility gods who demanded a portion of what they helped produce: crops, animals, and children. The child sacrifice was usually the firstborn son because he would be the most precious thing to a family as the heir to all the wealth and possessions of the family. This practice was a temptation for the Israelites and forbidden by the Lord (2 Kings 3:27, 23:10). Although the firstborn of every man and animal belonged to the Lord, Israel was given specific commands for redeeming the firstborn (Numbers 18:15–17). This was Israel’s way of distinguishing itself from the different nations around them.

Background

Micah’s prophecy began with a general announcement to Samaria and Jerusalem that God had a case to present against the nations of Israel and Judah. He then laid out the first of two series of judgments against Israel and Judah. Micah described the sins that they had committed against God as well as their fellow man.

Israel had allowed the worship of idols and other gods to take root in their religious practices. Pagan practices had become a part of Israel’s worship to Yahweh. For example, they engaged in the pagan ritual of temple prostitution. They presented the money earned by prostitutes to God as an offering (Micah 1:7; cf. Deuteronomy 23:17–18).

The wealthy had oppressed the poor to gain more wealth and power. They lay awake at night, devising how they would collect more land by defrauding others (Micah 2:1–2). In their greed, they stole from the poor, women, and children. As a punishment for their sin, their possessions would be taken from them and they would be humiliated.

Israel's leaders had neglected their duties and led the people astray. Rather than protecting and instructing their citizens, they exploited and misled them. Micah used the image of cannibalism to describe how the leaders fed off those they were called to protect. Jerusalem's leaders were accused of increasing their power by using violence and oppression. Similarly, the prophets chose to seek after money, rather than speak God's truth to the people. They prophesied according to how much money their words might bring them. Israel's leaders were not directed by God; their actions were driven by greed and ambition (3:11).

Micah's first series of judgments was followed by a hopeful look to a distant future when Israel would be restored. God would eventually redeem His exiled people once again. He would lift Israel up above all other nations.

It was against this backdrop that Micah's second series of judgments began in chapter 6. This second series of judgments also concerned the issue of social justice in Israel.

At-A-Glance

1. God Reminds Israel of His Benevolence (Micah 6:3–5)
2. God Requires Justice, Love, and Humility (vv. 6–8)

In Depth

1. God Reminds Israel of His Benevolence (Micah 6:3–5)

Through the prophet Micah, God questions why Israel has turned against Him. Why have they turned to false gods? What did God do to deserve their indifference? He recounts how He delivered Israel from the slavery of Egypt. It would seem that Israel has forgotten the significance of their freedom from Egypt and His hand in delivering them. God has done nothing to provoke their negative attitude toward Him. He graciously rescued them from a life of cruel slavery and provided leaders to guide them.

God has also acted on their behalf with those who sought to harm them. He recounts how He disrupted King Balak's plot to have Balaam curse Israel. God's intervention resulted instead in a blessing over Israel. He has rescued Israel and acted to assure their continued freedom. He has maintained His commitment to the Israelites. These accounts are a reminder of what God has done for them in the past, as well as a reminder of His continued presence among them.

2. God Requires Justice, Love, and Humility (vv. 6–8)

What can Israel do to correct their broken relationship with God? Their immediate response is to offer sacrifices to God. They first suggest reasonable sacrifices of calves and burnt offerings. However, they exponentially increase their offer of sacrifice to ridiculous levels. They ultimately offer the human sacrifice of a firstborn child, which was customary of pagan sacrifice but prohibited by the covenant law (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2–5). The ridiculous nature of their offers seems to imply that there might be no pleasing Yahweh. However, Micah's prophecy, in keeping with other Israelite prophecies, clearly indicates that the inward condition of one's heart is of

more concern to God than outward religiosity. God doesn't require outrageous sacrifice; He has already told them what He requires. As communicated earlier in Micah's prophecy, God requires that His people would once again be a just society that loves mercy. He desires protection for the oppressed and poor. He desires that His people would act mercifully toward one another. He requires that they would continue to walk in covenant fellowship with Himself.

Search the Scriptures

1. Why do you think Israel had forgotten the significance of their miraculous deliverance from Egyptian slavery (Micah 6:4)?
2. Why do you think their first response was outward sacrifice, rather than inward change (vv. 6–7)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Micah's message to the people indicated that God is more concerned with the inward state of one's heart than outward shows of piety. What causes us to try to look spiritual outwardly, while secretly knowing we're out of step with God's will?
2. What does it mean for today's Christian to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God? Do you find these requirements easy or difficult to live out in your own life?

Liberating Lesson

We live in a world where we are bombarded with advertisements daily. It has been said that the average person today sees more ads in a day than people in the 1950s saw in their lifetime. These ads have a subtle way of making us ungrateful and dissatisfied, so we crave new products and luxuries and pursue them no matter what the cost—even injustice. God wants us to be satisfied with the blessings He has given us. By remembering what God has already done for us and who He is, we will be motivated to seek justice for others, not wealth and comfort for ourselves.

Application For Activation

Consider the ways that God has blessed you. Do you sometimes forget all that He has done in your life? In order to get out of yourself this week and focus on God, create a list of things God has done for you. As you create this list, think about one thing you can do for others who are treated unjustly.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Micah 6:3–8

3 O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.

Here the Lord pleads His case. He asks the people of Judah the reason they have become so unfaithful as His covenant people. Specifically, He asks what He has done to them and how He has wearied (Heb. la'ah, lah-AH) them. This word means to be tired or to give up. The Lord asks, "How have I offended you? How could you become dissatisfied with Me?" He gives them an opportunity to testify (Heb. 'anah, ah-NAH, to answer or, in a legal suit, to provide opposing testimony) against Him.

4 For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

Next, the Lord rehearses His blessings and how gracious He has been toward His people. He brought them out of Egypt. He redeemed them from slavery. He sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. They were not left without leaders but were guided to the Promised Land.

5 O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the LORD.

Next, the Lord brings up the incident with Balak the king of Moab and Balaam the prophet. Balak feared the Israelites coming out of Egypt, so he hired Balaam to pronounce a curse on them (Numbers 22:1–6). Quite the opposite happened, as the Lord caused a donkey to speak to Balaam and refuse to go any farther (vv. 22–30). This opened Balaam's eyes to an angel of the Lord in the middle of the road, who told him not to follow through with the king's orders (vv. 31–35). After this, Balaam could do nothing but bless them. Each time he opened his mouth, he blessed God's people. The Lord here shows them that even when their enemies tried to curse them, God fulfilled His promise and they were blessed instead.

Shittim and Gilgal are references to the Israelites' conquest of the land. Shittim was the place where Joshua camped east of the Jordan River, and Gilgal is where they crossed to take over the land. It was quite common in military annals of the ancient Near East to summarize the itinerary of the conquering king as a way to summarize the whole conquest. The reference to these places was God's way of reminding them of all that He had done to give them the land they now enjoyed.

6 Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?

Micah establishes a courtroom setting in which the Lord is the accuser (plaintiff) who charges Israel, the accused (defendant), with social and religious injustice. Judah attempts to respond to God's indictment by asking how they can approach God, who is so high and mighty, under the shadow of their own sin and transgressions.

The act of bowing (Heb. kafaf, kah-FAHF) shows homage or respect to royalty. It is similar to the Greek word proskuneo (pro-skoo-NEH-oh), which means to lie prostrate as a form of worship. The people of Judah acknowledge the royal and lofty nature of God and realize that the King of kings is worthy to receive their obeisance. Because of the greed of the religious and political leadership, they have not paid God the respect and honor He deserves.

Not only does God deserve their honor as the King of kings, but He must also be offered sacrifices, particularly burnt offerings. The burnt offering (Heb. 'olah, oh-LAH) is a gift that ascends to the heavens. A portion is given to the priest to offer to God and the remainder is consumed or burned. The offering is dedicated completely to God. Young calves, or any animal less than a year old, were often sacrificed to render this type of offering. By their question, Judah knows they should have been engaging in these sacrifices. Yet their questions also indicate how far they have strayed from the Lord's covenant promise.

7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

Judah continues an arrogant defense of their crimes by sarcastically asking what the Lord requires. The people know that sacrifices of rams are pleasing to the Lord. Yet they exaggerate how many sacrifices they should give to God by asking if thousands of rams will do. The Hebrews are aware that oil is used in anointing royalty and in presenting gifts to God. Yet they are overzealous in their need to repent and ask if many rivers, not vials, of oil will suffice. Micah again uses this rhetorical line of reasoning to show how far the people are removed from God. They are not aware repentance needs to occur.

The line of questioning and sarcasm continues with Judah even offering "the fruit of my body" or their firstborn as restitution for sin. Micah alludes to the importance of the Lord receiving the first fruits of the harvest for sacrifice. This passage also alludes to God delivering the firstborn of the Hebrew children from the angel of death during Israel's enslavement in Egypt (Exodus 12). This giving of the firstborn also refers to human sacrifices practiced at times by the Israelites' neighbors (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5).

8 He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Micah now offers a response to the questions of verses 6 and 7. None of what Judah has offered is what the Lord desires. God does not seek sacrifices, offerings, or rituals. The Lord wants the people to treat each other fairly and to walk according to His way. Obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22).

To do justly or carry out justice comes from the Hebrew word mishpat (mish-PAHT). It means judgment or a right sentence. It is the establishment of right through fair and legal procedures in accordance with the will of God. Mercy is translated from the Hebrew word khesed (KHEH-sed, pity, lovingkindness, or doing good for those in a lower position) and is similar to the Greek word for grace. Some scholars distinguish grace as favor God bestows "just because," whereas mercy is favor "in spite of" sinful behavior. God's mercy withholds the punishment despite our guilt. The idea of walking humbly with God is juxtaposed with Judah's arrogance and refusal to lean on the Lord (Micah 3:11). Because the people have allowed their lust for money to interfere with their relationship with God and have chosen their own selfish gain, Micah warns that He wants them to submit, to return to the commandments and the way of the Lord.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Micah 1:2-6

Tuesday

Micah 2:6-11

Wednesday

Micah 3:8-12

Thursday

Micah 6:9-16

Friday

Micah 7:1-7

Saturday

Romans 6:20-23

Sunday

Micah 6:1-8